



REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER NETWORK ANNUAL ACTIVITY UPDATE DEC 24 - DEC 25

FOREWORD

The **Minister for Social Security and Disability, Right Hon. Sir Stephen Timms MP** (who we call **Minister Timms** for short) is putting the views and voices of disabled people at the heart of government work.

Minister Timms works with a group called the **Regional Stakeholder Network**. We call it the **RSN** for short. The RSN helps the government listen to disabled people. It was started in 2019 and has helped the government during important times like the Covid pandemic and Queen Elizabeth II's funeral. More recently the RSN has worked with the government on important topics including changes to the support that disabled people receive.

WHAT IS THE RSN AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

- The RSN was set up in 2019 by the **Disability Unit (DU)**, which is part of the Cabinet Office.
- Its main role is to stand up for the rights of disabled people and make sure their voices are heard in the UK government. It offers a regular opportunity for disabled people and people who support them to discuss the issues facing disabled people in their local area, and share these thoughts with the government.
- There are **9 regional groups** across England. A region means a local area, like the North West.
- Each group is run by an **RSN Chair**, who are volunteers and independent of the government. Chairs are chosen because they understand disability issues and how government work affects people in their local areas.
- The groups have members, made up of local disabled people, parents, carers and organisations that help disabled people. Chairs are responsible for working with their members and for getting new members. Chairs meet with their regional members regularly.
- Chairs meet with the DU every month and with Minister Timms every 3 months.

THE THEMES

How the themes work

- Every 3 months the RSN talks about a different topic with the government and Minister Timms. We call these topics **themes**. Themes are chosen to match the work the government is doing at that time. This helps the government listen to disabled people before they make decisions which will affect them.
- RSN Chairs talk about the theme with their local members to hear what they think. Each month the Chairs meet DU to talk about the theme and other things important to disabled people.
- Every 3 months the Chairs meet Minister Timms to tell him what the members in their local areas think about the theme. Depending on what the theme is, DU and other government department staff also join these meetings. We put a summary of the meetings on the [government website](#) that are available in different accessible formats for everyone to use.
- The Chairs also send more detailed written information to the government after these meetings.

Theme: December 2024 – Employment support

- This theme was about the help the government gives disabled people to find or keep a job. This included the government's plan called **Get Britain Working**, which also included the **Youth Guarantee** to help people in England aged 18 to 21 to get education, training, or a job. The plan also looked at making sure employers give disabled people **reasonable adjustments**. These are changes to make things fair, like a ramp for wheelchair users or accessible information.

What the government heard from the RSN

- ***Discrimination:*** Many disabled people feel they are treated unfairly when trying to get a job or move to a better one.
- ***Employer understanding:*** Employers need to know more about disabled people's needs and to understand that some disabilities affect people differently day to day.
- ***Reasonable adjustments:*** Disabled people need better support at work. Reasonable adjustments are not made in the same way everywhere or they take too long.

- ***Access to Work:*** This is a government programme that pays for extra support at work. The service is too slow, which can mean people lose a job offer because support isn't ready in time.
- ***Jobcentre staff:*** More staff need training to help disabled people find or keep a job right for them.
- ***Employment support services:*** There are fewer services to help disabled people find jobs. Most help comes from charities, councils (who look after local services), or the NHS.
- ***Benefit fears:*** Many people are scared to try a new job or set up a business because it is hard to get back on benefits if it doesn't work out.
- ***Fears of being forced to work:*** Many disabled people cannot work because their health is bad. We should not make them get a job if it will make their health worse.
- ***The Disability Confident scheme:*** This is a group of organisations that give jobs to disabled people. There should be more checks for organisations that are part of this scheme.

A more detailed summary of what was heard can be found [here](#).

How the government used the insight

Minister Timms and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff found this feedback helped shape their thinking about employment support for disabled people at the time the government published the **Get Britain Working** plan. DWP is the part of the government in charge of employment support and benefits. They heard these direct voices of disabled people as they worked on their new employment support ideas. They also found the feedback useful to consider as they started to make their plans for changes to health and disability benefits.

Theme: March 2025 – Welfare reform

This theme was about the government's plans to change **health and disability benefits**. Benefits are money from the government to help with living costs. This was before the government carried out a consultation to find out what disabled people think about a plan called the **Pathways to Work Green Paper**. A Green Paper is a report that shares ideas for new laws. A consultation is when the government gives people information about plans and asks people what they think about it.

What the government heard from the RSN

- ***Worry about changes to benefits including a benefit called Personal Independence Payment (PIP):*** Disabled people are worried that their benefits will be reduced or they will lose the support they need. Many want to work but are afraid that they will lose benefits if they work.
- ***Difficulties with PIP applications:*** Applying for PIP can be hard. The forms can be difficult to fill in, and the process is stressful.
- ***Universal Credit:*** Some people have been moved from other benefits to a different benefit called Universal Credit and found this stressful. They felt forced to apply for the wrong jobs and that DWP staff did not understand their needs.
- ***Benefit delays:*** Benefits can take a long time to get, which affects how people can live their lives.
- ***Costs and support to work:*** Disabled people can face extra costs to work. People who can work when they have support don't want to lose their Access to Work help. It can also take a long time to get this support. People aren't sure about getting back to work and what support they can get, as many jobs don't understand the changes disabled people need to be able to do their work.

- ***Checks for getting benefits:*** The system for checking people's health conditions doesn't feel fair and some conditions don't count. Some people's conditions change from week to week. If people have a disability that is never going to change, they shouldn't have to be checked over and over again.
- ***Carers support:*** It is important to keep helping unpaid carers who look after disabled people.

A more detailed summary of what was heard can be found [here](#).

The RSN also sent their lived experience regional insights into the Green Paper Pathways to Work consultation that ran 18 March to 30 June 2025. Some regions sent a group response.

How the government used the insight

Minister Timms and DWP found these RSN views of disabled people useful to help shape their plans for how to make changes to health and disability benefits, at a crucial time when the consultation was out and a new law was being talked about in Parliament. The insights also helped Minister Timms and DWP to decide how to set up a Disability Advisory Panel and the Timms Review of PIP.

Theme: June 2025 – Accessible and Assistive Technology (ATech)

This theme was about **ATech**. ATech is equipment or systems that help disabled people do everyday tasks that are hard for them, like a screen reader for computers which helps blind people read information. In the **Pathways to Work Green Paper**, the government shared ideas for ATech. These include the setting up of an online tool to help disabled people find information about ATech, and the setting up of a new group of people to help make ATech better for disabled people.

What the government heard from the RSN

- **ATech costs:** The biggest problem is that ATech costs a lot of money to buy and repair. The government doesn't always help with these costs.
- **Information:** There should be one place where people can find out what ATech exists and how to use it. There also aren't many places to get ATech, and it varies across different areas of England.
- **Help for blind people:** More technology is being used to help people who cannot see well.
- **Access to Work:** Getting this support can be slow, and staff do not know enough about ATech, which can really help some people at work.

- **Workplace rules:** Some jobs don't let people use the ATech they need because of computer security rules or high costs. If people do get ATech there can be problems about who owns the ATech if someone moves jobs.
- **Try before you buy:** Local places are needed where people can test ATech before spending money.
- **The technology:** There is a lot of useful ATech, but most is made for everyone to use - it's not always changed to work for different disabilities. Some people also need support to learn how to use ATech or go online.
- **Education:** the staff who write the Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for children don't know enough about ATech and what should be offered. Teachers need ATech training.
- **Positive examples:** there are some good practice examples locally.

A more detailed summary of what was heard can be found [here](#).

How the government used the insight

The RSN information was useful when the government created a new [ATech digital resource](#) to help people find the tools they need. This was published in December 2025 and will be reviewed and revised as needed during 2026. Minister Timms, DU and DWP continue to find this insight from the RSN important as they continue their work to help disabled people find and use ATech.

Other work on ATech

The work: The RSN Greater London Chair worked closely with the government on its work on ATech for disabled people. Insight from the regional members was collated and ideas shared on what stops people from getting the ATech they need; how it could help people and its risks; how to test new products; supporting a marketplace for people and employers to access ATech; and about training people to use ATech. The Chair took this insight to lots of meetings and events on ATech for disabled people. These meetings and events were also attended by people working in ATech, government Ministers and MPs.

Government action: The government used this insight to feed into its ongoing work around ATech. The RSN Chair continues to be a key stakeholder, attending government ATech events/roundtables.

Theme: November 2025 – Transport

This theme was about how disabled people feel about using **transport** like buses, trains and taxis. It looked at how the government and the **Department for Transport (DfT)** can make travel easier and safer for disabled people. The DfT is the part of the government in charge of transport.

What the government heard from the RSN

- ***Disabled transport passes:*** It's harder to get a pass which lets disabled people use public transport for free or for less money. They often don't work before 9:30am or after 11pm, making it hard for people to get to work or go out. These passes should work for all types of transport.
- ***Buses:*** Wheelchair spaces are being used by pushchairs. Bus stops aren't accessible (easy for disabled people to use) enough - people often have to get off into a cycle lane, which can be dangerous. Some countryside buses have been cancelled or bus stops are too far apart, so expensive taxis are needed.
- ***Blocked pavements:*** Pavements are sometimes blocked by cars and things like electric bikes, and uneven surfaces. There aren't always accessibility features, for example low kerbs to cross the road.

- ***Trains:*** Many train stations and trains aren't accessible. Common problems are signs too high, no lifts, or disabled toilets used for storage. Changes to train times can leave disabled people stranded.
- ***Trams:*** Trams in certain regions can still be hard for disabled people to use.
- ***Safety:*** Disabled people are worried about their safety on transport, especially in the evenings.
- ***Electric Vehicles (EVs):*** Worries about the move to EVs, due to cost and the infrastructure is often not accessible. Lack of charging points in the countryside and they aren't accessible.
- ***Disabled parking:*** Not enough disabled car park spaces, with too many used for EV charging. Areas have different Blue Badge pass rules. Blue Badges allow parking in disabled spaces.
- ***Taxis:*** There aren't enough accessible taxis.
- ***Community and hospital transport:*** There's less money for the community transport that many disabled people use. Local hospital transport needs to improve so expensive taxis aren't needed.

- **Staff training:** Not enough transport staff have had disability training. Transport that is supported by staff in the morning sometimes doesn't have support staff in the evening.
- **Apps:** Too many apps for different transport and the apps are often not accessible.
- **Involving disabled people:** Disabled people should be involved when plans and decisions about local transport are made. There are some good examples in some regions.

A more detailed summary of what was heard can be found [here](#).

How the insight was used

The **DfT** said the RSN local insight was very valuable. They will use this feedback as they continue their work to help make transport better and more accessible for disabled people. DfT also said that they want to talk to the RSN again in the future about their work.

EXAMPLES OF OTHER KEY RSN WORK

Disability pay gap reporting consultation

The work: The government published its plans for making large employers report on their ***disability pay gap***. The disability pay gap is the difference in average pay at work between disabled and non-disabled people. The government asked people what they thought about these plans through a consultation that ran from 18 March until 10 June 2025.

The engagement: The RSN shared regional lived experience insights on disability pay gap reporting. Some of the RSN Chairs and members went to meetings organised by the government to share their views, both online and in person, and submitted consultation responses. A range of views were heard including positive ones about how this plan could tackle differences in pay and discrimination, but also about the stigma (being treated differently) that can make it hard for people to be honest about their disabilities at work, and also the cost and burden of reporting for organisations, which could make them less likely to employ disabled people.

Government action: The government welcomed the views from the RSN which allowed Minister Timms to hear lived experience views from disabled people and their representative organisations, alongside larger organisations. They've used the insights shared by the RSN, other stakeholders and businesses during the consultation period to help develop how disability pay gap reporting will work, ensuring disabled people's voices are heard from the start. The government response to the consultation and next steps has now been [published](#). The government will keep talking to the RSN and other stakeholders as this work moves forward.

Keep Britain Working Review

On behalf of Sir Charlie Mayfield, DWP asked the RSN Chairs for their input during the engagement phase of the Keep Britain Working Review, following the discovery phase report. The Review looked at how employers can help disabled people to get and keep a job by providing more support.

The Timms Review

Minister Timms asked the RSN Chairs to send their good practice examples of co-production to DWP in the engagement phase at the start of the Timms Review into how PIP is working.

The Activity Trap

The work: The East of England RSN Chair attended a meeting hosted by Minister Timms. It was chaired by the Disability Access Ambassador for Sport Tim Hollinsworth and attended by representatives from Activity Alliance, Sports England, Disability Rights UK and Durham University in January 2025 to talk about the Activity Trap research, which shows that disabled people feel they can't be more active because they worry they might lose their benefits. The RSN Chair/members insight showed that generally people felt too afraid to exercise because they worry the government will stop their benefits if they're seen as physically active.

Government action: Minister Timms and Sports England said it was very important to hear this lived experience from disabled people. The government will use this insight when planning future work.

International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2025

A number of the regional RSN Chairs and members attended an event hosted by Minister Timms to celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities in December 2025. The event brought together a large number of stakeholders across the disability area.

Strengthening regional partnership with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)

The WMCA is an active member of the West Midlands RSN, with two officers with lived experience contributing directly to the RSN work. This collaboration has deepened relationships between the West Midlands RSN and regional government, whilst feeding into central government. During the year, the RSN Chair and members provided insight shaping key regional work with the WMCA - most notably on a report called “Making the West Midlands an Exemplary Region for Disabled People”.

The Lilac Review

Several RSN Chairs and members attended government events for the Lilac Review. This review looked at the challenges for disabled people who start their own businesses. In May 2025 some of the Chairs went to the House of Lords for the launch of the Review’s final report, which was hosted by Small Business Britain.

Government calls for evidence/consultations

RSN regions provided collective group insights and lived experience into numerous government consultations and calls for evidence, including the Department for Health and Social Care **Men’s Health Strategy call for evidence** in September 2025.

The government then published the [Men's Health Strategy](#) in November 2025, to tackle physical and mental health challenges faced by men and boys, and reduce inequalities. Another example was the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's **Digital Inclusion Action Plan call for evidence** in April 2025. The plan aims to break down barriers so that disabled people are not left behind as more services move online.

Menopause Advisory Group

In April 2025 the South West RSN Chair and members attended an event for the **Menopause Advisory Group**, who bring together Ministers and businesses to help women get better support at work during the menopause. The RSN asked the government to ensure information is made in an easy to read format, to help people with learning disabilities or neurodivergence understand their rights at work.

Disability History Month Reception

Some of the RSN Chairs attended an event at the Speaker's House in the Palace of Westminster in November 2025. The Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP hosts this annual event to celebrate and teach people about the important stories and history of disabled people. Guests included MPs and external stakeholders, such as from disability charities.

FACTS ABOUT THE RSN

- **Total Chairs: 9** (one for each region of England).
- **Total members:** Around **200 members** across the regions.
- **Regional group members:** Made up of disabled people, parents and carers, along with people from charities, Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs), other disability focussed groups, Local Authorities and education. DPOs are organisations run by and for disabled people. The members also represent people from cities and the countryside, and from different types of disabilities. This makes sure the government hears from many different people with lived experience of disability.
- **Meetings held:** More than **60** regional meetings. **10** meetings with the Disability Unit. **4** meetings with Minister Timms (December 2024, March 2025, June 2025, November 2025).

JOIN YOUR LOCAL RSN AND HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD

The RSN works best when it hears from many different people with different experiences. By joining your local regional group, you can help make sure the government understands what life is really like for disabled people in your area. There are 9 regional networks across England.

Members tend to be made up of: local disabled people, parents and carers of disabled people and disabled people's representative organisations. You do not have to be a disabled person to become a member. You should be interested in the issues facing people with disabilities. ***Please note: RSN Chairs are not able to deal with individual issues or personal queries. Members are not paid.***

How to get involved

Ensure disabled people's voices are heard - join the RSN. Complete this application form www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-to-join-a-regional-stakeholder-network-for-disabled-people and email it to your local RSN Chair:

- **North East** Elspeth McPherson neastrsn@gmail.com
- **North West** Ali Gunn rsnnwest@gmail.com
- **Yorkshire and the Humber** Ailith Harley-Roberts rsnyorksandthehumber@gmail.com
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